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ABSTRACT

The role of nonformal university adult education (UAE) in revitalizing vocational education and training (VET) in marginalized neighborhoods in Ireland was examined. First, an examination of the barriers affecting participation in VET in marginalized neighborhoods identified the following barriers: situational barriers arising from individual life situations; institutional barriers, including the physical inaccessibility of education and restrictive rules and regulations; and dispositional barriers related to learners' own attitudes and self-perceptions. Next, empowering (as opposed to dependency- creating) strategies and practices for encouraging greater participation in VET were identified. The research culminated in development of a model for facilitating access within community groups that would encourage greater participation in VET by residents of marginalized neighborhoods. The six stages of the model are as follows: (1) targeting; (2) contact and communication; (3) consultation and negotiation; (4) program development; (5) program implementation; and (6) progression. Evidence of the effectiveness of the partnership model's effectiveness is the successful partnership between the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education at the National University of Ireland and a large number of community-based groups to empower poor and working-class residents of marginalized neighborhoods to embark on a "progressive ladder of learning" culminating in various certificates, diplomas, and degrees. (Contains nine references.)(MN)

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RESOURCES NOT COURSES:
The role of non-formal community based networks in breathing life into Vocational Education and Training in marginalized neighbourhoods

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RESOURCES NOT COURSES:
The role of non-formal community based networks in breathing life into Vocational Education and Training in marginalized neighbourhoods

by: Dr. Máirtín Ó Fathaigh and Mr. Denis Staunton

Despite the good economic performance that has taken place in Ireland over the past number of years, the benefits of this growth are not being felt by all sections in the Community. The figures for the long term unemployment remain substantially high and certain neighbourhoods in large urban areas experience economical and social exclusion. Social exclusion can result from poverty, lack of education, lack of access to information, illiteracy/technological illiteracy, physical isolation and lack of voice in determining the future. Brian Nolan and Tim Cullen of the Economic Social Research Institute (E.S.R.I.) published "Poverty and Policy in Ireland" in late 1994 and showed that "three out of four poor households are headed by a person with no qualification and a further 19% are headed by persons with only junior cycle qualifications". The E.S.R.I. Annual School Leavers Survey shows that in 1989, 19,500 young people left school with no leaving certificate. The Central Statistics Office Labour Force survey in 1995 highlights the particular problem of the 44+ age group who have no qualifications. Ireland's record of mature students in higher education is not impressive. In 1994/95 only 5.4% of full-time students were mature students. In Britain, 25% of full-time students are mature students. Similarly, a survey carried out for the Higher Education Authority suggests that mature students in Irish Colleges are predominantly middle class: the rate of representation of working class students is not significantly better than among non-mature students.

"One of the biggest problems facing socially and economically disadvantaged mature students in entering higher education is actually reaching a stage, educationally, psychologically and economically, where they are in a position to apply". There is a need for "the development and increased resourcing of the adult, community and further education sectors, so that alternative entry routes to higher education are fully available for those who are in need of a second chance".

> Technical Working Group of the Steering Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education (1995)

UNIVERSITY ADULT EDUCATION

University Adult Education (UAE) in Ireland is fundamentally no different form UAE elsewhere in the developed world, being mainly concerned with those who have sufficient resources to use university facilities to better themselves as individuals. As Zwerling (1982) and Thomson (1980) have suggested, adult education is mainly for the 'haves' in society. The most disadvantaged social strata receive least resources for adult education. The vast bulk of UAE in Ireland is directed centrally on individualisation and reflects the structures of society uncritically. There is little or no appreciation in mainstream university adult and continuing education in Ireland, for the warnings sounded by people like Zacharakis-Jutz (1988) that individualization is a tool by the dominant culture to foster utopian visions, riches and glory, and personal freedom and power. Yet in reality, focusing on the individual only to the exclusion of the role to which the person plays in his/her social groups, and to the exclusion

of the system and the structures of society which ascribe those roles in the first place, leaves most people, particularly those marginalized by society throughout poverty and unemployment, profoundly powerless relative to the state of dominant institutions. Through the process of individualisation, UAE practice, like adult education generally, is largely concerned "with designing techniques that will change the individual learner's behavriour and inculcate coping skills to make up for what are claimed to be objectively identified deficiencies" (Collins, 1991).

This paper looks at the above phenomenon, focusing on the question of "empowerement" of the "excluded". In the past three/four years, the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education, University College, Cork in partnership with community based groups have developed different models in trying to address this problem. Our first starting point was to attempt to understand why particular groups of people do not participate in vocational or training programmes.

A review of the factors which influence participation was summed up by Houle (1961) as follows: "the most universally important factor is schooling. The higher the formal education of the adult the more likely it is that he/she, will take part in Continuing Education. The amount of schooling is in fact so significant that it underlies or reinforces many of the other determinants".

Research that has focused on the question of why adults don't participate in education and training has given us the "deterrent" concept. This concept suggest that there are a number of barriers which stand between the potential learner and his or her participation in a learning opportunity. The deterrents to participation have been categorised in a number of ways. Perhaps the best known is that used by Cross (1981) when she summarised them as –

Situational: Situation Barriers rise from individual life situations. These have to do with the context of adult life, work, domestic, leisure and social responsibilities. Child care and transport arrangements may not be available. Those in employment may not have the facility for pay release from work to pursue their further training.

Institutional The physical inaccessibility of education creates further barriers. Rules and regulations which define the time, place and entry requirements of course of study or simply the non-availability of courses required by the student. Financial barriers present obvious problems.

Dispositional: Dispositional barriers relate to the learners own attitudes and self-perceptions. Common among these are that learning is often difficult or threatening, that learning is something that children do in schools, not something which adults should be involved with, or that learning is useless and irrelevant.

Non-participation by any individual is likely to be caused by a complex combination of factors rather than one or two easily identifiable barriers. All too often analysis focuses on only one reason for non-participation, resulting in simplistic or ineffective attempts at solutions. Several studies have suggested that it is the dispositional factors – attitudes, perceptions, expectations – which form the most powerful deterrents and tend to be underestimated by Educational Institutions and training providers.

PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIP

Conventional Adult Education models of provision will not succeed in areas of Economic and Social disadvantage unless real participation and partnership structures are put in place. The traditional model is a dependency creating one and is in no position to give a satisfactory answer to the supreme need for people-empowering development; participation may increase the institutions' efficiency but not people's capacity for problem solving.

The reason then why participation is not just 'useful' in people-centred education programmes, but their very essence are the following:

> People will not commit their own resources (i.e. labour, energy, information, social relationships, enthusiasm, commitment) if they do not have the impression that the activity to which they are contributing is, to a considerable extent, theirs, i.e. controlled and 'owned' by them.
>
> This sense of ownership and belonging is in turn intimately linked to the eventual sustainability (or collapse) of the educational effort.
>
> Perhaps the most important resource, information, will not be forthcoming in a consistent, integrated manner if the joint effort is not built on the basic premise that "people too are professionals '(experts)'" and on some fundamental comprehension and working knowledge of cross cultural communication.

I am talking here of a radical cultural change. This change is not simply at the administrative and organisational level, but one at the very heart of the educational enterprise, namely, who defines knowledge? Who owns knowledge? Who decides what is knowledge and what is not knowledge? The following diagram attempts to describe the present model of Adult Education provision and the assumptions which underpin the mode of delivery and organisation in contrast to the 'lived experiences' and needs of the Community sector.

DEPENDENCY CREATING VERSUS EMPOWERING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

	Dependency creating	Empowering
Initiated	In educational institution	The need identified in the community group
Begins with	A formal programme	Problem solving action
Programme design/process	Static – 'expert' led	Evolving collaborative
Primary resource base	Central funds and regional administration	Local people Local resources
Supporting organisation	Existing or built top-down	Built from bottom-up
Social analysis	To justify programme/meet assessment requirements	For problem definition
Error/Problem	Ignored or buried	Embraced
Communication	Top-down communiqués	Participatory communication
Management focus	On time 'termination'	Sustainability
Evaluation	External Intermittent Expert-led Cost-benefit activities-biased	Participatory Continuous Creative Process orientated
Capacity for problem solving	Decreased	Enhanced

FACILITATING ACCESS WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS

The model that we have found to be successful and one that we would wish to share with our European colleagues is the partnership model which would include the following six integral elements.

- Targeting
- Contact and communication
- Consultation and negotiation
- Programme development
- Programme implementation
- Progression

Stage I: Targeting

The principle of market segmentation runs counter to the undifferentiated, single approach to student recruitment which had been traditionally operated by many third level education Institutions. Special targeting is essential if opportunities are to be extended to under-represented and deprived sectors, who may experience a significant cultural divide between their norms, values and educational expectations and those reflected in the educational system. Considerable research evidence exists in other educational systems that targeting is an effective and equitable way of improving access for some non-participant adults in the community.

In practice, this will require third level institutions adopting a policy of positive discrimination in favour of certain communities and committing the necessary resources for the appointment of a Neighbourhood Educational Co-ordinator to work with existing community groups and networks to identify, affirm and accredit existing activities and meet unmet needs.

Stage II: Contact and Communication

To attract non-participant adults requires addressing, at first contact stage, by listening and sharing, some of the ingrained attitudes and perceptions engendered by factors such as socio-economic background, community circumstances, personal disabilities, lack of confidence and self-esteem, and lack of trust in the system. Personal approaches are now widely regarded as the most effective and perhaps only means of reaching non-participants and overcoming their resistance to educational activity and anything associated with it.

Work with non-participant groups requires a basic shift away from what has been termed the 'come and get it' approach towards outreach methods and strategies. 'Outreach' has been described as a process' whereby people who would not normally use adult education are contacted in non-institutional settings and become involved in attending, and eventually in jointly planning and controlling activities, schemes and courses relative to their circumstances and needs' (Ward, 1986, p.3).

A primary role in outreach activity is to establish networks, liaise with other agencies and initiate or extend links between the University and Community Organisations and/or activists.

Much outreach research indicates that non-participants are not easily recruited as individuals and it is considerably more effective (as well as less time consuming) to approach existing groups, community centres and associations than to knock on doors. Also, the powerful influence of peer and reference groups with certain sections of the community reinforces the argument for targeting groups rather than individuals. The latter factor has been very significant in the recruitment and retention of students on the community-based Certificate/Diploma in Social Studies over the part three years.

Stage III: Consultation and Negotiation

The involvement of new, traditionally under-represented, groups in the adult learning process requires patient consultation, dialogue and negotiation of their learning needs, interests and requirements must take place on a basis of mutual equality and respect. All aspects of the learning process for adults should be negotiated in advance: not just the form and nature of provision but methods of delivery, styles of learning, modes of evaluation and attendance requirements.

Stage IV: Programme Development

The starting point for outreach programme development is 'working from where people are; using their environment, issues and concerns as a basis for development'. This approach takes cognisance of expressed educational interests and needs, acknowledges and uses people's experiences in learning programmes and can assist the process of personal and/or community empowerment.

Stage V: Programme Implementation

Certain issues and conditions are essential in work with people who may have previously shunned formal third level education, such as:

- Flexibility of timing to suit personal/family responsibilities;
- Informal learning environments in which learners can feel comfortable and unthreatened;
- Sufficient time to master skills;
- Participative and flexible learning methods;
- Support mechanisms (help with costs, childcare, etc.)
- Tutors with facilitating and enabling roles and skills.

> While educational progression may not necessarily be the primary goal of first stage learning activities for non-participant groups, one of the aims should be to make people aware of other opportunities, and to help them move on to other forms and levels of learning if they wish to do so. The development of natural progression routes and mechanisms is an important feature of the access process. The application of these six stages to facilitate access by non-traditional students to U.C.C.'s learning opportunities may be illustrated by the case study of Cork's Northside Education Initiative (report available at conference).

PRINCIPLES OF THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL

Over the past five years, the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education has worked in partnership with a large number of community based groups.

The education initiatives are a grassroots response to the increasing marginalization and alienation of poor and working class groups in Ireland.

One of their distinctive feature is their locally based independent nature.

> The emergence of daytime education groups in which women, predominantly from rural and suburban working-class communities, provide education for themselves and other women represents a rupture in the organization and the philosophy of adult education in Ireland (Inglis, 1994).

Through this experience, several important principles or organisation and pedagogy have been established which can be plainly stated. Some are implicit in the type and approach of the courses; several actually grew out of the practical experiences of establishing the courses; all of them taken together present a perspective on our work which cannot be ignored if that is to be properly understood and appreciated as a new approach to adult education.

- We work directly with people and groups in the Community.
- Such people and groups are always linked with existing Community or Education provisions.
- There would always be a particular link person with whom courses are planned and agreed as part of a developing programme based in the community.
- The work will always be student-centred with students and prospective students involved from the start in planning course content.
- A problem-centred approach will often be used in order to reveal the most useful areas of study and activity for a course.

- People will have come from a group which was well-established and active in pursuit of some community or study aims; it would have had experience at working and struggling together on some project.

- The content of the course would have two basic and closely related elements – work in practical skills, improving people's effectiveness as organisers or students, and "thinking" work designed to enable people to deepen their understanding of Community issues or to study social problems and social policy. (If fact these two elements have been found to enhance each other).

- Further, during the course period people would work together in a variety of ways: in their large groups, in smaller groups or pairs on projects or tasks, and as individuals wrestling with a particular problem often through an essay or other written work discussed in a tutorial.

- Essentially all of our work would stand or fall by virtue of its ability to contribute towards a continuing experience in the Community or in study, extending not only abilities and understanding of groups and individuals but commitment to ongoing work.

- The courses thus have an enabling function, as people develop activities in their locality and in wider community organisations, solve problems, and make progress towards goals agreed by them with local community, social, or education workers.

THE WORK IN PRACTICE

In 1996/97, the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education has 58 outreach learning centres throughout Munster (a radius) of 200 miles from Cork City). We have put in place a "progressive ladder of learning" which enables the students to proceed from a Certificate to a Diploma to a Degree. One example of this model is a Degree in B.Soc.Sc. (Youth and Community Work). This is the first Degree programme in Ireland which is delivered on an outreach basis and at Community Level. The University also has in place a "quota" system for mature students within all facilities and departments. Our recent research indicates that some 24% of students who have successfully completed our Diploma programmes have progressed on to full-time Degree courses under the mature student quota.

This work is new and challenging and not completely supported by everybody as it challenges the traditional elitist view of third level education in Ireland. In conclusion, I would like to end with a quote from Machiavelli which sums up our ongoing efforts.

> **"Nothing is more difficult to plan, more unlikely to succeed, or more dangerous to manage than to take the lead in introducing a new order. Your enemies are all those who profit from the old ways, and your defenders are those who will be only lukewarm in their support until they are sure of your success".**
>
> **(Machiavelli)**

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